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Sub-Commission on Prevention
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Protection of Minorities
Forty-third session
Agenda item 12

HUMAN RIGHTS AND DISABILITY

Written statement submitted by Disabled Peoples' International
a non-governmental organization in consultative status
(category II)

The Secretary-General has received the following communication, which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1296 (XLIV).

[16 August 1991]

1. Disabled Peoples' International, a cross-disability coalition of nearly 100 national affiliates mostly from developing countries, began efforts at the United Nations in 1982 to promote and protect the human rights of persons with disabilities and to prevent disabilities caused by human rights violations. In so doing, we have intended to instil our philosophy in United Nations human rights bodies: all persons with disabilities are citizens with equal rights, and hence should achieve full participation and equality with their fellow non-disabled citizens in all societies. We have also intended to emphasize our motto, Vox Nostra (our own voice), to reinforce our principle that only disabled persons, or persons designated by disabled persons and their organizations, speak for disabled persons.

2. We now await the final report of the Sub-Commission's Special Rapporteur on human rights and disability, Mr. Leandro Despouy. Owing to the historic nature of the final report as well as to our long, intense and highly productive process involving the Rapporteur, the Sub-Commission, the United Nations Commission on Human Rights and the Economic and Social Council, each of which responded favourably to our appeals, we would now like to review briefly the events that have led up to the report.

3. The Sub-Commission responded to our plea to focus attention on human rights and disability from 1982, our first year attending the session. Sub-Commission resolution 1982/1 introduced Mr. Asbjørn Eide and co-sponsored by 18 other members, began the process by highlighting the inclusion of persons with disabilities in the non-discrimination article (art. 2) of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The resolution began a reporting process by which Goverments, specialized agencies, regional intergovermental organizations and non-governmental organizations could present views regarding human rights and disability.

4. In 1983 and 1984, the Sub-Commission had before it reports of the Secretary-General (E/CN.4/Sub.2/1983/36 and Add.1-4; E/CN/4/Sub.2/1984/9 and Add.1, submitted pursuant to Sub-Commission resolution 1983/15) and Disabled Peoples' International setting out a variety of views on the topic. In 1984, the Sub-Commission, taking into consideration Commission resolution 1984/31 and Economic and Social Council resolution 1984/26, named Mr. Leandro Despouy as Special Rapporteur to prepare a comprehensive study on human rights and disability (see Sub-Commission resolution 1984/20).

5. The Rapporteur submitted a preliminary report (E/CN.4/Sub.2/1985/32) and a progress report (E/CN.4/Sub.2/1988/11). The final report was to have been presented to the Sub-Commission at its forty-second session (1990) but, due to a variety of difficulties, the Sub-Commission, in agreement with Disabled Peoples' International, suspended debate on the item and postponed presentation of the final report until its forty-third session (1991) (see Sub-Commission decision 1990/113 and E/CN.4/Sub.2/1990/SR.32 (statements of Mr. Despouy and Disabled Peoples' International)).

6. Between 1982 and 1990, Disabled Peoples' International has presented over 30 documents or statements to the Commission and Sub-Commission and has met extensively in Geneva with the Rapporteur and the Secretariat on issues set out in the Rapporteur's mandate. Additionally, the Rapporteur attended several international meetings of Disabled Peoples' International where he presented his ideas regarding the study and listened to much testimony from our members from all parts of the world. The Rapporteur also met with our Human Rights Committee for a five-day work session, and with our International Chairpersons and Executive Director during the course of other international meetings related to the topic. Disabled Peoples' International arranged for our Argentine Chapter to coordinate with the Rapporteur as necessary, and provided a special assistant to work with the Rapporteur in Buenos Aires to carry out special research at the direction of the Rapporteur.

7. Disabled Peoples' International has been exceptionally pleased with its warm, productive and creative relationship with the Rapporteur, the Secretariat and the Sub-Commission. 1/ Throughout this process, the Rapporteur especially has made himself available to us, and at all times manifested true understanding of our organization's dedication to full participation and our own voice. Because of this multifaceted cooperation, we are all assured that the final report will reflect the best thinking, the best insight and the best proposals for all of us as the United Nations and persons with disabilities approach the twenty-first century. Also, in part because of this historic work, we anticipate that the full realization of all human rights for persons with disabilities throughout the world is near at hand.

8. Realization of human rights will not be easy, however. No organization is more aware of the many daily struggles for dignity that persons with disabilities endure. These daily struggles can help to lead to a better way, especially with wide dissemination of the Rapporteur's study. For this reason, Disabled Peoples' International strongly urges the Sub-Commission to recommend to the Commission that the final report be published in the United Nations World Campaign for Human Rights Study Series or other appropriate series. We also urge the United Nations Department of Public Information, as well as Governments, to seek ways to provide editions of this work in languages other than the United Nations official languages and, of course, also on tape, in large print and in Braille editions for blind or vision-impaired persons. Because of the importance of this topic to the world's children with disabilities, we also encourage preparation of a children's version of this report.

Note

1/ Disabled Peoples' International also warmly thanks the many Governments that, through their financial and other support, have assisted the process at the Commission and ECOSOC level as well as in their own jurisdictions. While it is impossible to list them all, we must mention our "home" countries: Canada, Sweden and Zimbabwe, and the Rapporteur's country, Argentina.